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As fate would have it, such monuments to superficiality as neon billboards and million-story music-industry enclaves have turned out to be just as sure a tonic for the inspirational juices of L.A.'s alienated hordes as dole queues and the National Front were for those Brits engaged in the original punk explosion of '76. Believe it or not, this city is probably the most vital punk-rock venue in the world today.

As greater clarity comes to it all, established British punks like the Buzzcocks and the Clash, who began their musical lives as hard-core working-class angries, now struggle with a terminal loss of focus brought on by the march to middle-class record-biz acceptability, while such L.A. stalwarts as the Germs, Nervous Gender and Wall of Voodoo, whose primal disillusionment first gushed deep within the bowels of middle-class b.s. to begin with, continue to explore new domains of socio-musical adventure with far more immunity to social pressure or industry co-option. With a plethora of bands and numerous clubs like the Hong Kong, the Club 88, Blackie's, King's Palace and El Capulin Anticlub, this town is suddenly abuzz with more underground musical activity than at any time since the bebop era of the late '40s.

Not coincidentally, Los Angeles also boasts the most uncompromisingly authentic punk journal in the still-brief annals thereof — *Slash* Magazine, edited by Claude Bessy, a/k/a Kickboy Face (circulation 11,000 in the U.S., 3,000 in Europe).

With its screamingly intelligent commentary on all aspects of the worldwide scene, from London to New York to San Francisco (with special emphasis, of course, on local artists and issues), *Slash* stands as a landmark in the night for all other music sheets to gasp at in competitive despair (true!) The mag's monthly parade of interviews, concert reports and record reviews (*Slash*'s vinyl section is without doubt the most comprehensive on the planet) would alone qualify it as *de rigueur* for aficionados of the farthest reaches of the genre, from primitive chunka-chunka to the most bizarre and experimental. But it is the quality of writing itself that makes the publication equally essential for *all* fanciers of cultural critique, contemporary style.

With passionate wordsmiths in hand like Chris Desjardins, Craig Lee and Bessy himself, *Slash* makes new inroads into the nature of the art with every issue, something pop journalists haven't been doing for at least a decade. Kickboy, who writes everything in one draft, reminds me more than a bit of myself as a rockwrite upstart back in '67, and he easily qualifies as the Lester Bangs of the '80s, but with far more of an eye for the kernel of the matter. Oh yes, *Slash* also covers reggae — extensively. (One year subscriptions can be had for $10: P.O. Box 48888, L.A. 90048.)

Claude, who still wears a safety pin through the ear (with some sort of heart-motif whatsis of late), has recently expended more than a little of his energy on a band known as Catholic Discipline, with whom he is the singer. As this interview was conducted over bottles of Molson's and a half pint of Jim Beam at the *Slash* office on Beverly Blvd., he picked incessantly at portions of his paleish skin — "an old speedfreak habit," he says — and responded ever-so-politely to the phone callers who constantly interrupted the rap.

Q: *Hey, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?*

A: Although I have no precise recollection, I was born in June of '45 on the French side of the English Channel. My father was released from German prison camp about a year before so obviously he didn't waste any time. The day war was declared his cavalry outfit was supposed to fight the German tanks on horseback with sabres. After about five days of running south as fast as they could all 1200 of them surrendered to six Germans in two tanks, but two lieutenants on white horses, part of the old French nobility, committed suicide. My mother was still in high school and she waited four years for him to get out of whatever potato farm in Germany. He said four years in prison was better than having to go through Stalingrad and all that shit that other people his age went through. I was the product of two definite pacifists.

Q: *When did you first become aware of rock and roll?*

A: I was about 14 or 15. I didn't have a record player, but my parents did, and they played a lot of opera and light classical music, Johann Strauss. I bought my first 45, "What'd I Say" by Ray Charles. After one spin my mother grabbed the fucking record and broke it on her knee, saying "I don't want to hear that savage music." I knew then that if this could send my tolerant parents — both of them were schoolteachers — into such a rage, it was definitely something that had to be explored.

"I discovered all I went through had literary connotations afterwards, when I would bump into a book or something and realize I just lived another cliche!

Then I got into things like the English equivalent of the Ventures, the Shadows, all the French and English Elvis imitators like Eddie Mitchell and Cliff Richard, and I got into Dion, y'know, the whole stuff. I think my favorite cut when I was a kid was "Runaway" by Del Shannon, it obsessed me for about nine months.

Q: *How'd you end up in the states?*

A: Well I was in high school, I was a pretty good student but I was definitely parting from the normal way as far as taste is concerned. I was just reading a lot and being bored, and just from pure luck and bluffing I got to come here as a foreign exchange student in New Jersey for a year, a nice little taste of freedom. It was in the year of '63-'64, when Kennedy got done in and all that stuff, and I was having a great old time.

There were two factions in high school then, the collegiates — madras, people planning on going to Rutgers — and greasers — the Puerto Ricans, pointed shoes, purple shirts. I was definitely a lot closer to the greasers although I was supposed to follow a nice crowd. I was already into the guys listening to the Four Seasons — "Big Man in Town" — the New Beats, Dion — "The Wanderer" — and all that shit.

Q: *What came next?*

A: I tried a couple years of the Sorbonne, except I never showed up to classes. Also, a bunch of friends had stolen a bunch of movie equipment from the French army and I was kind of assistant to the assistant director of porno flicks. I did a terrible, terrible version of the soundtrack from *The Longest Day* — some French girl with an American hairnet just marching through with bombs exploding.

My first year of university was okay, I passed, second year I totally flunked. I was kicked out three months before the end of the year for being dead drunk in class one morning at nine o'clock, for being caught with a bottle of brandy and threatening a teacher. So it was either the French army or America. I'd used up everything France has to offer, I was already very bored with the French climate, French culture, everything.

From The Writings Of Kickboy Face, aka Claude Bessy

There's no way, Jose, to pin this fucking LP down. It kicked back like a brat in need of an exorcist . . . Mark Smith and the Fall don't give a shit about recognition (that being a sign of weakness, which is known to be bad for handling certain nighttime moments). But I don't give a shit about them not giving a shit. Basically it's the same old story. Either you feel it or you don't (the record), all the rationalizing will only make you dizzy in the end. The brain isn't meant to dabble with the unknown. If you're the proud owner of a heart and soul, they will know. Whether or not they enjoy it remains a matter of how far down the road of ever-present indifferent despair you like to jog. But don't shy away. It's loads of laughs on the way there.

Only madmen and fanatics still bother to define and track down evil. But when young, rebellious individuals with no spiritual affiliations decide to look into the matter, be ready for uncomfortable revelations. Take (this music) as just whacked-out rock 'n' roll, and you'll miss half the real fun (fun with a genuine threatening tension). Now you're hooked, right?

Q: *Did you leave with any sense of the grandeur of French avant garde or any of that crap?*

A: No, I was fed on it but I never thought of it as some kind of monument. It was just something to use for your own personal means, an incredible pool of material from Rimbaud to Artaud. But France is actually one of the most conservative countries on earth, why do you think the world *bourgeois* is French? So I came back to New York, spent about three-four months there, and right when the whole psychedelic nonsense was starting — summer of '67 — here I was, first time.

I left New York with five dollars, nobody told me where to go, and where do I arrive after three and a half weeks of hitchhiking and shit, I arrive right on Brooks Avenue in Venice! The Doors when I was here were the Doors of Perception, Love came a bit later, there were the Turtles . . .

Q: *Was music already your cultural backdrop then?*

A: No, I was just hopelessly, naively romantic. Music was a great soundtrack to the adventure of being that age and getting free of everything. The first time I took acid it was also the first time I saw the Airplane, and it became so hopelessly distorted I don't know if they were great or y'know. Anyway, after that '67 madness period, I lived about a year and a half in the Middle East.

Q: *Dealing hash?*

A: Well, trying to, getting busted for it, but mainly using it. I got stuck in Afghanistan for almost a year, so obviously I wasn't living on Perrier water. And it felt like just three weeks! I picked up a pretty nasty drug habit, methedrine, all you had to do in those days was go down to the pharmacy and ask for it, and they say yes, hydrochloride or sulfate? And they asked you if you needed the syringes to go along with it. So I made a habit of getting a room above a pharmacy whenever I stopped in.

Q: *Had you read William Burroughs before you did any of that.*

A: No, only recently. I discovered all I went through had literary connotations *afterwards*, when I would bump into a book or something and realize I just lived another cliche! I didn't feel like a cliche, except that it made it very hard to talk about it because everybody said oh no, not *that* story again. In the meantime I showed up for the French draft three years late and I told them I came as fast as I could. Before I knew it I was in a padded cell, I got put away in the civilian psychiatry ward because they said they didn't have the equipment to treat me. I was really in a methedrine world, and as far as the little army base in the middle of France was concerned it was the biggest case they'd seen.

Most problems in this part of town were people who drank too much cider and here I was with arms looking like Swiss cheese, they couldn't believe their luck. It said on the original diagnosis totally schizophrenic, probably dangerous, but those people don't want a really, really dangerous element in their midst. I pulled a whole number, said that I knew a way to find God, a shortcut, and they really started worrying. I've been thinking about it lately, if the same thing happened again I'm not sure if I'd wanna get out, I might wanna try to taste the horror. I've become so fucking obsessively anti-liberal I know that one day that attitude is gonna drive me to extremes.

Q: *So how long have you been back in L.A. on a semi-permanent basis?*

A: I've been here seriously since about '70, with one year-and-a-half interruption in London. I'm definitely from Los Angeles, there's no doubt, it's closer to the heart of the beast. But I did spend about four or five years in this town being really on the other side. I was a busboy in every greasy spoon in Santa Monica, I worked the bumper cars on the pier, threw the ball in the basket, all the carnival shit. I've tasted having to compete with wetbacks to get a dishwashing job — you won't work for less than $2.50 an hour and this guy will work for $1.65. I didn't see any way out, this country made me bitter, which is one of the reasons I'm really grateful to it. I'm glad I went through all of that because it really gave some focus to my hate. I learned how to hate well, which is really good, so many people waste their hate on the wrong targets.

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